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THE COMPULSIVE CANDIDATE

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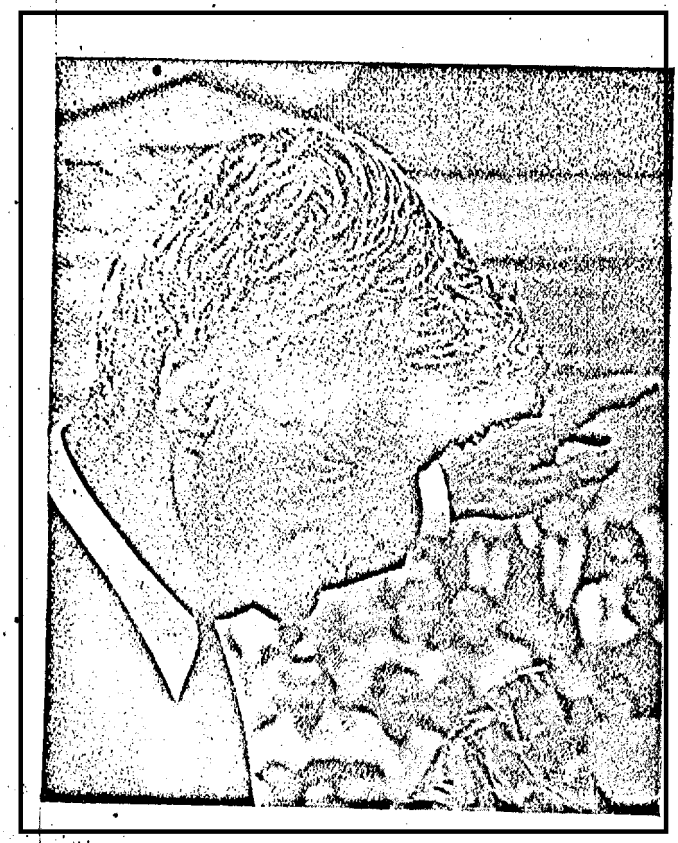

Robert Kennedy runs for President every day. His recent Latin American trip was an illustration of that. Leaping onto cars, plunging into piranha-infested waters, the senator campaigned relentlessly in five countries—always with one eye on the newspapers back home.

BY ANDREW J. GLASS *Photographs by Peter Sheler*

Each step Robert Kennedy takes seems calculated to thrust him closer to the Presidency. From his office in the U.S. Senate, he runs what amounts to a government-in-exile, financed by a family fortune, secured by a magic name, anchored by unshakable New Frontier loyalties. Kennedy's every political move is carefully timed and executed. At the age of 40, having shaken off the shock of his brother's assassination, the junior senator from New York is constantly on the move, seeking to enhance his prestige as a world figure. That was the principal reason why he traveled 12,000 miles through South America last November, and why he intends to tour the Soviet Union next year. What could be an explosive trip to racially tense South Africa is set for June, and a visit to Israel is also in the works.

Such a Kennedy trip is conducted in the grand manner with an entourage of presidential proportions. Surrounded by schedule arrangers, path clearers, bill payers, door openers, reporters, photographers and just plain traveling companions, Kennedy swoops down upon startled peasants, badgers leftist students in university halls, chucks the chins of shirtless urchins and generally disports himself like the hard-driving candidate that he is. He repeatedly plunges into hostile situations so potentially dangerous that he seems at times to be courting disaster.

All of this occurred on the senator's trip to Latin America, for it was in many ways typical of every Kennedy campaign. Orbiting about him during his 20-day tour was an "official party" that included three members of his staff: Miss Angela Novello, his longtime secretary; Adam Walinsky, a legislative assistant in Washington, assigned for the occasion to speech-writing, and Tom Johnston, a New York based aide who drafted schedules of whom Kennedy would (or would not) see. Johnston also

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acted as paymaster for bills submitted en route.

In his casual, off-hand manner ("How'd you like to go to South America with me?") Kennedy expanded the group. One day he just called up John Seigenthaler, editor of the Nashville *Tennessean*, who had once served as his aide at the Justice Department. During the trip Seigenthaler filed stories home and acted as *de facto* press secretary.

Another such casual recruit was Richard Goodwin, a Latin American specialist and a former aide to both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson.

William vanden Heuvel, a New York lawyer who once worked for Kennedy in the Justice Department, alternated as body blocker, note taker and speechwriter. Vanden Heuvel's wife, Jean, the daughter of millionaire Jules Stein, came too, and Kennedy teased her for "collecting" poets, painters and assorted intellectuals along the way.

Ethel Kennedy brought along two of her friends: Judy Harris, an old school chum, and Mrs. Frederick Ames Cushing, who works part time in the senator's New York office.

Kennedy had not been to Latin America since 1946 when, released from duty as a seaman second-class aboard the destroyer *Joseph P. Kennedy Jr.*, he made a six-week tour of the continent. Now, two decades later, his Latin hosts assumed he was there to gather experience for a presidential contest against Lyndon Johnson. At nearly every stop cheering throngs threw rose petals at his car and chanted "*Presidente, Presidente*" as he rode by.

"I am not thinking of running for the Presidency," Kennedy would inform reporters at every stop along his route—without quite shattering their convictions to the contrary. "I have a high feeling for President Johnson. He has been very kind to me. I would support his bid for reelection in 1968, and I strongly wish to campaign for him."

By any standard his trip was a success. But it also managed to unnerve a round of ambassadors, CIA agents, hapless policemen, soldiers and protocol-minded Latin officials—their best-laid plans repeatedly wrecked by the "Candidate"—who, on one gay evening, laughingly acknowledged that he was indeed running for "President of the World."

Kennedy's troubles with the American embassy officials began with his first stop, in Lima, Peru. Citing "security precautions," the embassy had withheld word of Kennedy's visit until the last moment, and only small crowds greeted him on his arrival. His staff was convinced that U.S. Ambassador J. Wesley Jones had held back in hope of scoring brownie points with Lyndon Johnson.

Leaving Ethel behind in Lima, where she was to visit a series of schools and hospitals, Bobby took off in an unpressurized DC-4 for a flight over the mountains to Cuzco, Peru. It was obvious from the beginning that no embassy plans were going to stop him there.

When he climbed out of the plane on Cuzco's sun-splashed dirt airstrip, a crowd of some 2,000 people watched from behind a barbed-wire fence. A solid phalanx of police, wearing military uniforms and wielding Czech tommy guns, tried to steer him toward a bouquet-bearing reception committee, but Kennedy instinctively headed for the crowd like a hometown politician.

Seeing him come, the people pushed forward and the fence collapsed. All at once dozens of bodies were strung across the wire. There were cries of pain. Kennedy's right cheek was cut, and a hole was torn in the knee of his trousers. The senator did not [illegible] and wore the ripped suit for the rest of the day.

That afternoon, a caravan of Land Rovers picked up the senator and those of his party who were not too exhausted by the effects of the thin mountain air and drove them through a village some 40 miles north of Cuzco. There a group of A.I.D. specialists from the University of North Carolina run a school to help the Indians improve their meager corn and potato crops. It was part of the Alliance for Progress, and the Alliance is what Kennedy had ostensibly come to inspect.

At one point en route Kennedy spotted a dozen grizzled peasants working in the cornfields beside the road. "Stop the car," he ordered. Soon the senator had leaped a wide ditch and joined them. None of the startled field hands knew who he was, although they sensed he was someone important.

Under questioning, the foreman explained that his men earned 12 *soles* (45 cents) a day. Kennedy shook his head sadly and moved back to the road. One of the Indians, however, ran after him. Haltingly, he told the visitor that he was forced to pay an exorbitant price for powdered milk being donated under the U.S. "Food for Peace" program.

"You look into this," Kennedy snapped to an accompanying Peace Corps guide.

Night had fallen by the time the party returned to Cuzco. Kennedy was tired and drawn, but still there was no rest. The embassy had set up a meeting with a group of leftist university students at the "binational center," which turned out to be a dingy second-floor hall decorated with outdated posters about the U.S. space program.

"Sometimes I wish somebody would say something nice about the United States," Kennedy said softly after the students had used the question period to make blustery anti-American speeches. Yet, exchanging sharp words with the students revived Kennedy. When the session ended, he escaped a new crush of admirers waiting for him in the street by beginning to run, racing Bill vanden Heuvel and Adam Walinsky 100 yards uphill to the hotel. Kennedy won by three yards.

When we returned to Lima, Ethel was eager to learn how her husband had done. "It went well," I told her. "Bob made quite an impression."

"Oh, aren't you *nice* to call him 'Bob,'" she said. "I don't think it's dignified for a man who's nearly forty to be called 'Bobby.' I wish everybody would call him 'Bob.'"

I suggested to her that she could help the situation by calling him 'Bob' herself—whenever Ethel refers to her husband in public, she invariably says, "Bobby thinks . . ." or "Bobby likes . . ." But Ethel protested that she had always called him "Bobby," and then she dropped the subject.

Kennedy was still angry about the way his campaign had been arranged in Lima, and he was relieved to depart for Chile, where old New Frontiersman Ralph Dungan, now the U.S. ambassador, had personally attended to the arrangements.

The pace let up. Dungan took Bob and Ethel home to his modernistic official residence on the outskirts of Santiago. He also found room at the residence for Miss Harris, Mrs. Cushing and John Seigenthaler. The senator and his friends enjoyed a quiet Saturday-afternoon swim in the springlike sun at the home of a wealthy publisher. It was the first day Kennedy spent in South America that he failed to visit a slum.

On Sunday, when the official schedule was resumed, Kennedy and Dungan flew to the [illegible] school near Vina del Mar, a coastal resort,

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In the Brazilian sugarcane fields near Recife, where Kennedy heard tales of wage-gouging, he grasps the hand of a laborer as Archbishop Mon wearing a tie is Bobby's interpreter.

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...800 children were gathered in the courtyard, all wearing white smocks. In the course of the speechmaking, Kennedy was introduced as "the future President," and this seemed to make him a little nervous. He drummed his fingers on a copper plate that two of the children had given him.

"My thanks to all of you," Kennedy said, when it was finally his turn to speak. "President Kennedy really believed in education. Problems made by man, he always felt, could be solved by man. We have immense problems in the United States—the same kind of problems you have in Chile. We are making a tremendous effort in the United States, and it is being made in Chile. But, in the last analysis, it's up to you. *Adios* and *gracias*."

The mayor took the microphone. "Let's give a hand," he said, "to Robert Kennedy who is *our* candidate for President of the United States."

Vanden Heuvel, who hopes to be *Kennedy*'s candidate for a political office in New York State, was quite upset by the remark. "You're not going to write that President thing, are you?" he asked.

Kennedy was an hour late when he reached Viña del Mar for a private lunch with Chilean President Eduardo Frei. The president received his visitor at the door of his summer palace, a lovely castle overlooking the sea. They walked around the splendidly kept grounds together, and then went to eat a leisurely meal. Kennedy was elated by the encounter: His own ideas closely parallel Frei's belief that the crucial issue in Latin America is not the struggle between the forces of Communism and anti-Communism, but rather whether Communism or the democratic left will lead the revolution against oligarchy.

We flew back to Santiago aboard a U.S. Air Force C-47. The next day, what the Kennedy entourage came to call their "all-expense-paid slum tour of South America" resumed. Santiago's slums, called *callampas* (mushrooms), proved every bit as dreary as the *barriadas* of Lima. Kennedy stepped over the sewage and walked into many of the hovels, asking questions about the slum-dwellers' lives, smiling sadly at the replies and giving away PT-boat tie clasps of the kind his brother used in the 1960 campaign. At each stop the senator deftly scampered up and down the trunk lid of his embassy-provided car as if it were his second home. (Several weeks later Stephen Smith, the senator's brother-in-law, received a $300 bill in New York for damages to the various vehicles Kennedy had used for speaking platforms in Chile.)

Ethel finally rejoined him—she had spent the morning at the hairdresser's—and the two Kennedys stood together on top of the car. "I give you the mother of nine children," the senator said, raising his wife's hand as if she had just won a prize fight. The slum dwellers cheered.

That evening Kennedy spoke to 3,000 university students from the Santiago area. About two dozen students screamed "Kennedy go home" when the senator reached the platform. Their demonstration was short-lived. A flying wedge of pro-Kennedy students moved menacingly toward the demonstrators. Realizing they were badly outnumbered, the leftists departed of their own accord, but not before scuffles had broken out in the stands. When the commotion subsided, Kennedy took the microphone and declared: "I'm sorry they left. I'd have liked to learn from them." The students cheered for a full three minutes.

All along, the senator's official press secretary, Wes Barthelmes, who had remained behind in Washington, was sending Kennedy reports on how the television film clips and news stories were being "played." In South America Kennedy never left the headlines, and radio stations suspended their regular programs to provide blow-by-blow reports of his movements. But Kennedy was upset, because—back home—the clippings were scanty and the "play" subdued.

Long before Kennedy's arrival at his next stop in Concepción—Chile's third-largest city and the hub of an industrial complex where the Communists and Marxist Socialists, their even more radical allies, command a virtual majority—Chilean security services had tipped the U.S. embassy that trouble awaited the senator at the university. Kennedy ignored the warning.

The senator arranged, however, hours before a scheduled confrontation at the university, to meet privately with about a dozen key young Communists in a suite at his hotel. Separated by a wooden table, Kennedy and the radicals sized each other up during an exchange similar to those Kennedy had used to advantage in dealing with Southern segregationists during civil-rights crises. The goal, then and now, was to fashion a "scenario" in which nobody would get hurt. For two hours Kennedy reasoned with his Communist adversaries, trying to get them to admit there was another side to the issues they had raised about U.S. policy. "Why do I give a damn?" he said. "Why do I sit here and listen to you? There are a lot more pleasant things to do in Concepción. But I'm here because I'm interested in the revolution in Chile. Certainly, Chile has differences with the United States. I know that. Yet Chile gets more assistance, per capita, than any other Latin nation. Do you ever think about that? No. Because it doesn't fit your position."

The Communist students crossed and recrossed their legs. One fiddled nervously with his tie.

"I'm not coming here to fool you," Kennedy went on, slapping the table hard. "I've had a candid conversation with you. I doubt we could have had this meeting in Havana, Peking or Moscow. I'm delighted we could in Chile. That's why I'm against Communism."

A Communist student spat directly in Senator Kennedy's eye, and another kicked at his outstretched hand.

Kennedy turned to the real purpose of the meeting. "Would you like me to come up to the univer-

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Poor Brazilians hang on Kennedy in Salvador. His party called trip their "all-expense slum tour of South America."

sity?" he asked the Communists.

"No, not me," their apparent leader answered in English. "We do not condemn you personally," he said, "but as a representative of a government whose hands are stained with blood. If it was up to me [and it was], I would not let you speak."

Some of the earlier, reasonable quality drained out of Kennedy's voice. Aggressively he jabbed a finger at the students, keeping time to his words. "Fifty or sixty persons can stop a speech," he said. "I know that. I don't mind getting hit by an egg. I've been hit by worse in my career."

He paused and looked down at the floor, rubbing his shoe against the threadbare carpet. "In my judgment, if I can say so, the great indictment of your position is that you won't let me speak. You describe me with blood on my hands: I haven't had a marine stick a bayonet in *you* yet." Then Kennedy took his final stab. "Let me make a deal with you," he said. "You speak for fifteen minutes, and I'll speak for fifteen minutes."

But the student leader refused and, on that note, the meeting broke up. Those seated near the door filed out quickly so that Kennedy wouldn't have time to reach them and shake hands.

As evening approached, vanden Heuvel, Seigenthaler and I sat down with Kennedy in his bedroom to go over the situation facing him at the university. The New York lawyer and the [illegible] editor both argued persuasively against taking the chance of making an appearance. Kennedy, they said, had done well on the previous night in Santiago. The Communists had been thrown out. This time they would be there in force. If anybody was going to be thrown out, it would be Bobby. With absolutely no police protection available (because Latin American tradition does not permit police to enter university territory), a serious incident could occur. People could be hurt. There would be bad publicity. Kennedy listened attentively but was himself noncommittal.

He stripped to his shorts and fingered a religious medal dangling from a gold chain on his neck. "I know I won't be able to speak," he said matter-of-factly. He was sitting up on the bed, his legs crossed. A decision still had to be made. Time was growing short. Kennedy took a bath. As he dressed, he said little.

Two Christian Democratic students from the university, members of the group that had asked him to speak, knocked on the outer door. Vanden Heuvel let them in. "If you don't come," one of the student leaders said, "it will be a great victory for the Communists. I don't know how long it would be before we could show our faces."

The rector of the university, a small and obviously timid man, knocked on the door soon after and was also admitted. He felt a visit by Kennedy would [illegible] be responsible for the senator's safety. Then came

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an American priest, the Rev. Fred Hegarty, a leader of Chile's Catholic Action movement. Kennedy asked his advice. "It would be great if you could go," the priest said.

"I've *got* to go," Kennedy said at last.

By now the bedroom was full of Kennedy staffers, reporters, people from the university and from the embassy. Ethel, who had been touring girls' schools all afternoon, walked in and said she was coming along. Kennedy didn't argue. He cleared the bedroom and changed shirts, taking off the one he had put on barely 20 minutes before. (Kennedy is compulsively clean. During the trip he changed his shirt as often as 10 times a day.)

Then it was time to go. We all jumped into the cars parked in front of the hotel. The crowd, pounding on the cars and yelling "*Viva* Kennedy!" made it difficult to pull away.

As we approached the university, about half a mile from the hotel, three police cars peeled off from the motorcade and stopped. Just before we entered the grounds, the plainclothesmen's car also dropped out of the motorcade.

Kennedy strode briskly toward the hall, flanked by Goodwin, Seigenthaler, vanden Heuvel and a few American reporters.

The gymnasium had been converted that evening for use as an auditorium by the addition of a speaker's platform at the far end. The stands were jammed with about 2,000 young men and women, all yelling at the top of their lungs.

Kennedy walked slowly around the deserted gym floor, moving clockwise. He had nearly completed a full circuit when he passed beneath the section where about 100 Communists were seated. They gave a great animal-like howl and let fly a barrage of eggs, bits of garbage, coins and small stones. Surprisingly the fusillade missed its intended target, while those of us who were walking close to the senator were all hit. Egg yolk ran down the right side of vanden Heuvel's suit. My own suit was a mess.

Kennedy reached the lectern, and the tumult continued unabated. "Go home, go home, you Yankee son of a whore," the Communists chanted. They sang the Chilean national anthem and then the Cuban anthem. Kennedy stood up for both.

The chanting resumed. "Santo-Dom-in-GO, Santo-Dom-in-GO," they were yelling now.

"Hungary, Hungary," the students seated opposite them yelled back. Kennedy sat down and the commotion subsided a bit. He folded his arms across his chest and waited silently, a slight smile crossing his lips.

Ten noisy minutes passed. The gymnasium floor was filling up. Girls pressed forward toward the platform, seeking Kennedy's autograph.

Suddenly Kennedy hopped on the table, yanking the microphone from its cradle. His translator jumped up with him. "I believe in freedom," he shouted, looking up at the Communists. "I believe in free institutions. And I *will* speak tonight."

No one standing more than a few yards away could hear a word he was saying.

"I do not come tonight and say that the United States is without fault," Kennedy went on, shouting every word. "All human beings make mistakes. But we support your revolution with our hearts because you are making the same effort we are making in the United States."

The Communists resumed singing the Chilean national anthem. This time Kennedy kept right on talking. "We support your effort to build a new society. But we believe, most of all, in the right of free expression. We don't believe in spitting on people. We don't believe in throwing eggs. . . ."

His free hand jabbed the air. "If they are right," he yelled, pointing at the Communists, "let one of them come down here and debate me. Let one of them be a spokesman and let the people in this room decide."

"Assassin," the young Communists screamed.

"Will you come down and join me in debate? Come on down! Come on down! I challenge you to a debate! I am willing! Will you test your ideas before the students of this university?"

The curses the Communists were screaming were no longer printable.

"Do you want me to come up there?" Kennedy shouted. Without waiting for a reply, he leaped off the platform. We pushed our way toward the Communists, making a path for him. He stood on a chair just below the section where the Communists were seated, and raised his right arm as if to shake hands. A student seated in the front row, two feet beyond the farthest reach of Kennedy's fingertips, spat, hitting the senator directly in his right eye. The spittle dripped down his cheek.

One of the Communist students with whom Kennedy had argued that afternoon sat to the left of the spitter. He grabbed him by the back of his shirt and started to drag him away. Kennedy's arm was still outstretched. Another student swung himself under the railing and began kicking at Kennedy's hand with flailing feet.

Kennedy climbed off the chair and turned to vanden Heuvel. "Let's go," he said. "We've done what we came to do." Then, with the tip of a clean white handkerchief, he wiped the spittle from the corner of his eye.

Ethel was watching all this from the sidelines, along with a man from the embassy. As Kennedy moved toward the door, the Communists in the stands set a U.S. flag afire. The embassy man giggled nervously. "Don't you laugh when the American flag is being burned," Ethel said sharply.

Back at the hotel, Kennedy changed shirts and was off again within half an hour to a party he was giving for one of our traveling group—a photographer who had turned 31 that day. Soon Kennedy was relaxing at an inn at the edge of town, set aside just for the birthday celebration—acting for all the world as if he had done nothing more strenuous than sign a couple of letters.

We returned to the hotel after dancing until almost 2 A.M. At 4:30 vanden Heuvel was calling on the telephone getting everyone up. "Come on," he said, "the senator wants to go to the coal mines."

The miners at Lota, Chile's only coal-mining complex, earn $1.25 a day. Their union is solidly Communist. The embassy had kept Lota off the senator's schedule. When, in the predawn hours, the Chilean authorities discovered to their dismay that Kennedy was going there anyway, elaborate security precautions were ordered. Kennedy found out about them when he saw *carabineros* snapping to attention every 100 yards as we drove along the fogbound road between Concepción and Lota.

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'You can't go down,' the mine manager insisted.

'Why can't I?' asked Kennedy, disappearing down the shaft.

where the mines burrow five miles under the Pacific.

Although the police were ready, no one had told the mine officials at Lota that Kennedy was coming. He surprised them by striding into the pithead, surrounded by reporters and photographers and officials, just as the 7 A.M. shift was arriving.

"Can we go down into the shaft?" Kennedy asked Jack Martin, the Chilean mine manager.

"No, that is impossible," Martin sputtered.

Kennedy fell in with the miners headed for the elevator shaft. "You can't go down," Martin said, running up behind him.

"I mean, why can't I?" Kennedy said, stepping aboard the elevator just before it plunged downward for 1,500 feet. Most of the others, including Martin, were left behind. Apparently to thwart the senator, someone up above ordered the coal cars to depart at once. (The last group of miners aboard the elevator with Kennedy would thus have to walk to where the coal was being dug.)

Kennedy grasped immediately what had happened, and he sprinted for the little train, already 100 yards down the damp tunnel and fast gaining speed. He narrowed the gap until, with a flying leap, he dived head first into the trailing car, landing on his hands and knees.

As the cars clanked forward, the senator—crouching to avoid a low-hanging high-voltage wire—turned to the shift superintendent, a ruddy-cheeked Welshman named George Bright who happened also to be aboard the last car.

"If you worked here as a miner," Kennedy asked him, "would you be a Communist?"

"I'm afraid I would," Bright replied. "We breed them here."

Once Kennedy had succeeded in boarding the coal train, Martin halted it and came down to join him below. "Can't we go back now?" he asked.

"Um. Let's go to the end," Kennedy said. "How far is it?"

"Oh, about fifteen miles," Martin said.

"Now, don't give me that. *How far is it?*"

Martin hesitated. "Well . . ."

"*How far?*"

"It's three miles to the end of the line and then another two miles' walk to where the men are working," Martin said.

At the end of the line the miners jumped off, and Kennedy followed, pausing in the near-blackness to introduce himself as "Senator Kennedy from the United States" and to shake hands.

Martin was beside himself. It was far too dangerous to go any farther, he said. Did the senator happen to know that four men were killed in the mine last year, and four the year before?

Kennedy walked on, trailed by a dozen reporters and photographers who had come down in the second wave with Martin. "No, Senator Kennedy. No," the mine manager yelled from behind. "*Please*, Senator Kennedy."

The senator reached the end of the tunnel in about half an hour. Only two men could walk side by side in the narrow space. He shook hands with a number of miners, including one who said he was the father of 23 children (11 of them living). Then he turned back.

Early the next morning Kennedy left for Argentina, where he would spend only 48 hours before departing for his next stop, Brazil. As the plane banked and rolled through a high pass in the Andes, the senator scanned a large loose-leaf briefing book prepared by Walinsky and entitled *Easy Answers to Hard Questions.*

Soon after we landed at the military airport in Buenos Aires, blue-helmeted Argentine Air Force police began swinging away with their clubs at the crowd, trying to keep the people as far as possible from Kennedy. U.S. Ambassador Edward Martin had met Kennedy in his Cadillac, but Kennedy now climbed out of the car, chased 300 of the policemen away and shook hands all around.

"*El Presidente! El Presidente!*" the crowd cried.

"He's crazy," said an embassy security man who had been riding in the next car. "These are volatile people. Their mood could change at any moment. They could *kill* him."

Kennedy was being mobbed in a sea of happy faces and enjoying every minute of it. Finally the ambassador's Cadillac swung free and sped to Martin's residence—a mansion that a member of the Kennedy entourage described as "a Versailles occupied by Babbitts." Another crowd had gathered outside the residence's high iron gates, and the *cuerpo de guardia infanteria* had deployed 100 men around the building, their Sten guns pointing at the crowd.

Instead of entering the mansion, Kennedy walked outside the gates and into the street, again waving all of his military protectors away. "I bring you warmest regards from President Johnson and the people of the United States, and I hope you all go home now," he said.

The next morning, Kennedy and his police escort, their sirens screaming, raced around Buenos Aires. "Come back as President," a man shouted as we drove down a street in the financial district.

The next day, November 20, his 40th birthday, he left for Brazil. As he landed at São Paulo's Congonhas airport, a military band struck up *Happy Birthday*—giving the tune a slight Latin twist. It was a Saturday afternoon. Although nearly eight million people live in the São Paulo area, the streets were virtually deserted as the Kennedy motorcade raced downtown to his hotel. "I counted at least one hundred people," Kennedy said ruefully.

Ethel had quietly been planning a private birthday celebration for him at the home of a wealthy American couple, Henry and Mildred Sage, friends of the Kennedys who had moved to São Paulo. Ethel had written a half dozen sharply satirical—

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Hustling downriver to keep an appointment with Venezuelan President Leoni, Bobby helps push stalled Indian canoe.

even libelous—songs based on the Kennedy trip and its imagined impact on some well-known U.S. political figures. After the singing the group filed in for dinner where the birthday spoofing continued. Ethel, holding a large paper bag, pulled out a series of party favors and explained what each signified. There was, for example, a toy airplane that she described as a U-2 plane that Lyndon Johnson had ordered to spy on Bobby's progress.

The next day the senator met with 20 Brazilian student leaders at the Sage home. As they sat in the expensively furnished living room, sipping soft drinks, the young Brazilians argued that Johnson had sold out Kennedy's Alliance for Progress.

Kennedy emphatically rejected such reasoning. "President Kennedy and President Johnson are both attempting to accomplish the same objective," he said. "But you have to remember that they are very different human beings, and they go about things differently. The problems are the same. Go back to when President Kennedy was alive. He wasn't always so highly thought of as he is today."

Kennedy cut short his exchange with the students to board a chartered Viscount in time to attend a soccer game in Rio de Janeiro's huge Maracana stadium that afternoon. Jumping up every few minutes, applauding furiously, smoking away on a cigar, Kennedy absorbed himself in the all-star exhibition match between Brazil and the world-champion Russians. Every time Brazil kicked the ball toward the Soviet goal, Kennedy would spring to his feet and thousands of shirt-sleeved Brazilians in the crowd of 200,000 would turn and applaud the senator.

Kennedy did not want to spend too much time in Rio because the inter-American conference of the Organization of American States was then in session, and he feared that his presence might tend to eclipse that of Secretary of State Dean Rusk. So immediately after the game he left for the 90-minute flight up the coast to Salvador, a city in the impoverished northeast region of Brazil, where Kennedy was scheduled for more slum visiting.

It was November 22. When it had happened, two years ago, he had been near his swimming pool at Hickory Hill, eating lunch with Ethel and two Justice Department friends. Now he was in Brazil, remembering his dead brother at the eight-o'clock mass in Salvador's São Francisco Church. Candles glinted on its walls, carved in delicate patterns and covered with gold.

Seated amid poor Negro women, Kennedy and his wife went to their knees as a young and intense priest wearing sunglasses celebrated the mass. Kennedy's face was forlorn—for that moment all the unspeakable sadness had returned. When it came time for him and Ethel to take communion, they lingered at the altar long after the other communicants had returned to their seats.

The tour was on once more. Salvador, the first capital of Brazil, is a city of old churches, steep hills and grand views of the sea. Shabbily dressed women carry huge bundles balanced atop their heads. At an orphanage Kennedy quietly chucked the dark little children under their chins, playfully twisted their ears and patted them on the head. The children sang *God Bless America*.

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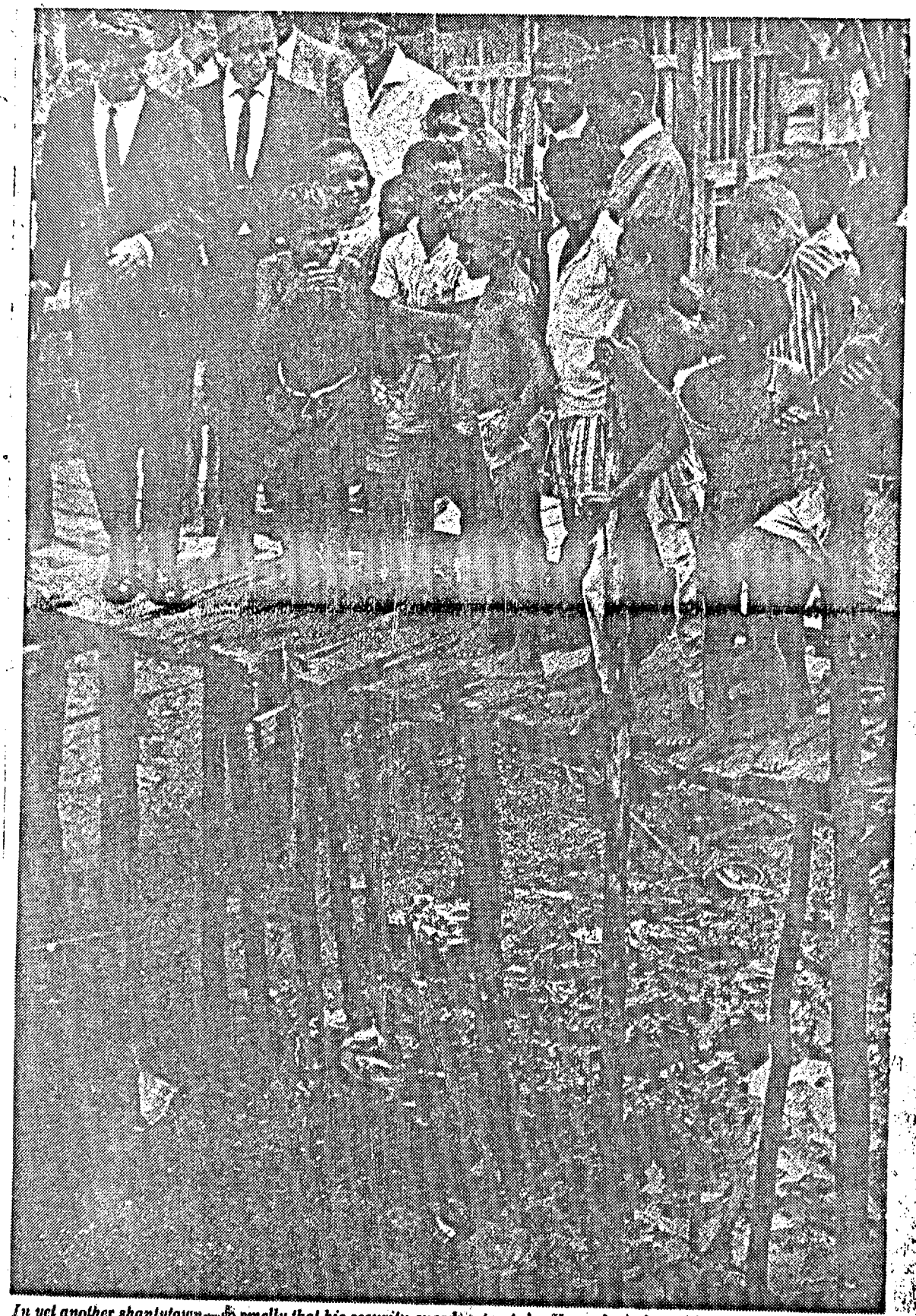

In yet another shantytown—so smelly that his security guards retreated—Kennedy jostles with some tag-along children.

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Kennedy moved on, through the flies, past the staring, unresponsive people of the slums, through the mud and the open sewers and the searing, humid heat. The stench became so foul that Kennedy's five-man Brazilian security guard deserted him and returned to wait in their police car, swearing softly.

The women held out their naked children and watched the strange procession go by. Whenever he stopped to give a short speech, he would invariably ask the children to stay in school "as a favor to President Kennedy."

When, at last, Kennedy reboarded the plane, he sat by himself for a long time, leaning forward, his face buried in his arms.

In Natal, where he spent most of the day, more than 100,000 people came to see him and to cheer when he rode by in a jeep overburdened with friends, newsmen and photographers. It was Cuzco all over again. That November 22 the people of Natal, in honor of their visitor, set off round after round of firecrackers. The loud report—not unlike that of a rifle shot—made Kennedy wince.

As night fell, Kennedy jumped to the top of a truck so he could be better seen. The cheers, punctuating his every sentence, were deafening.

"Every child an education!" he said, pausing between each word.

"Every family adequate housing!

"Every man a job!"

And then, as the evening star shone down on Natal, he finished by saying: "As long as there is a Kennedy in public life in the United States, there will be a friend of northeast Brazil."

The Viscount swung south again and headed for Recife, the biggest city in northeast Brazil, where he was to spend the night. A light and carefree mood infected the group. Goodwin led a carload of Kennedy's friends in a chorus of risqué songs as they drove from Recife airport to the home of the American consul, a high-walled stucco villa surrounded by soldiers armed with submachine guns.

The next morning, in searing 90-degree heat, Kennedy toured the nearby sugarcane fields. Trampling through the newly cut stalks with a landowner in a white linen suit by his side, he halted often to ask the sweating peasants how much they earned and how they lived. He was surprised to discover that the cane cutters worked six days a week for less than a dollar a day—under an apparently semifeudal system that forced them to spend at least two days' earnings to buy their necessities at the plantation's "company store."

When the party finally stopped in an open field for a box lunch, several union officials who were working to organize the cane cutters approached the senator. Even the miserable minimum wage fixed by the government, they asserted, wasn't being paid by the landowners. In fact, they said, most of the workers were receiving three days' pay for six days' labor.

Just then one of the union officials spotted a leading landowner snapping pictures of the senator with an expensive Japanese camera. Kennedy motioned for him to come over.

Oh, no, the landowner protested, all the cane cutters receive the government minimum wage. The union leaders were spreading "propaganda."

Kennedy fixed his gaze on the man. "I was around today and I heard otherwise," he said. "Let me just say this to you: I think you're breeding your own destruction. You are tearing down your own society if you don't pay people a decent wage." Conditions in the sugarcane fields became a frequent theme during the rest of Kennedy's private conversations in Brazil.

Dean Rusk had by now departed from the O.A.S. conference in Rio de Janeiro, so it became diplomatically safe for Kennedy to fly back to Rio from Recife. However, since the big conference was still underway, Kennedy thought it would be prudent for him to stay at a hotel along Rio's crescent-shaped Copacabana beach, rather than at the baronial residence of U.S. Ambassador Lincoln Gordon. Wearing his favorite candy-striped bathing trunks, Kennedy spent the hot morning on the beach. Unrecognized by the throngs, he trotted for several miles along the fine white sand, accompanied by John Seigenthaler, and then swam alone out beyond the breakers so far that he was for a time lost from view.

At the beginning of the trip, back in Peru, Richard Goodwin had urged Kennedy to spend a long weekend, between stopovers in Rio and Caracas, visiting Brazil's Amazon jungle. The senator quickly approved the idea: It appealed to his sense of adventure. With the help of a wealthy Brazilian friend, Goodwin arranged the loan of an Electra from Varig Airlines, and Kennedy flew to Manaus (population 180,000), capital of the underdeveloped Amazonas region, and the river port where the Amazon proper begins its 1,000-mile course to the Atlantic Ocean.

After 200 pieces of luggage were removed from the Electra's hold, we prepared to leave Manaus aboard a white Dutch-built paddlewheeler chartered for the occasion. Kennedy had encountered two young and engaging American priests, working as missionaries in the region, and invited them to come along. The priests brought aboard a dozen hammocks which they strung along the afterdeck. Most of us preferred these to the paddlewheeler's stuffy staterooms, and Bob and Ethel Kennedy dragged mattresses from their cabin and slept beneath our hammocks.

We were making our way up the Solimões—a main tributary of the Amazon—at a speed of 10 knots, but against a strong current. The final destination was Manacapuru, a town of 25,000 inhabitants only 55 miles up the Solimões from Manaus. As the paddlewheeler nudged alongside a landing ramp 250 feet below Manacapuru, firecrackers went off and hundreds of children pushed forward to greet us. The town had never been visited by a Brazilian senator, much less by an American one.

Soon we were headed inland toward what we were told was "a lake quite suitable for swimming." Since it was too far to walk, a wide, low wagon was hitched to a tractor, and we hopped aboard. Kennedy invited dozens of children running beside and behind the already overloaded flatbed to climb on, and he led us in entertaining them with songs ranging from *We Shall Overcome* to *The Marine Corps Hymn*.

The tractor at one point swerved suddenly to avoid a deep hole in the jungle track. Kennedy was hurled off the flatbed and landed in the bushes on his back. He sprang to his feet, borrowed a bicycle from a boy riding behind the tractor and pedaled the two remaining miles to the lake while

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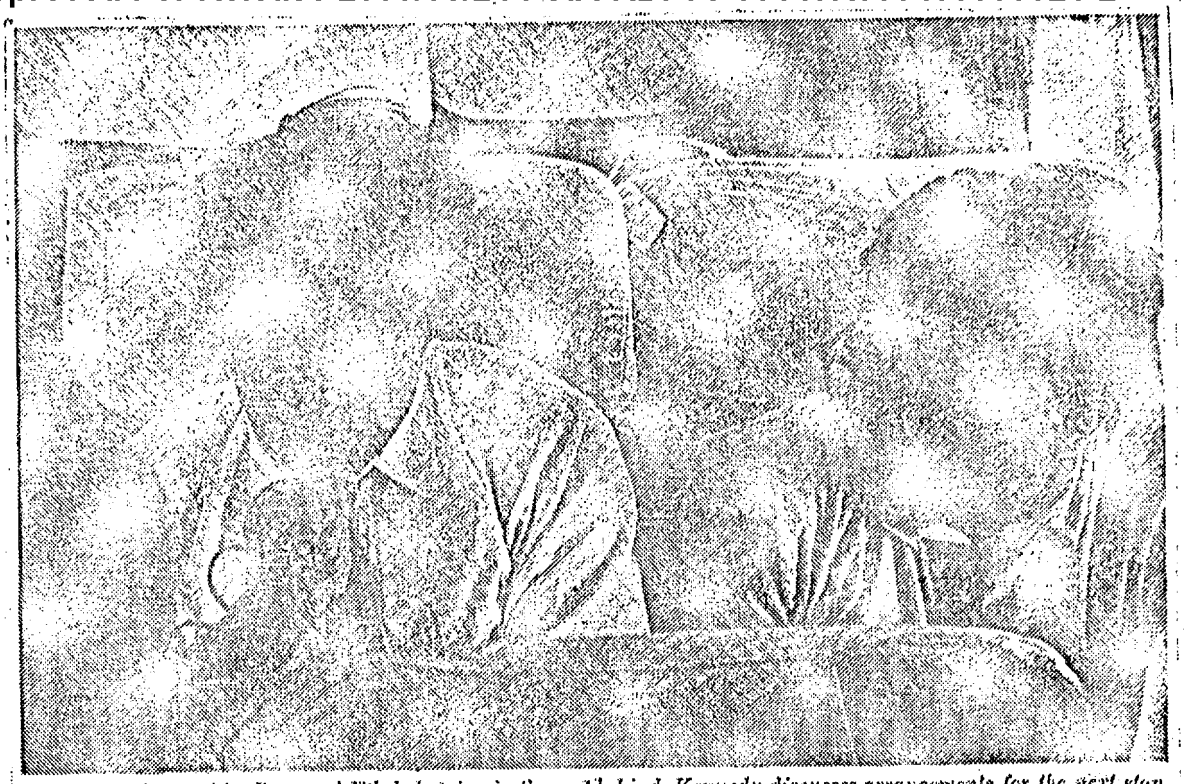

With the author at his elbow and Ethel sleeping in the seat behind, Kennedy discusses arrangements for the next stop.

carrying two children on the bike's rear fender.

At the lake, still surrounded by curious children, Kennedy took off his sweaty clothes and plunged into the water. He swam out to a large log bobbing 30 yards off shore and tossed a football back and forth with Goodwin. Not until we left did the local officials tell us that the "lake" was really a branch of the Solimões and, consequently, infested with flesh-eating piranha fish.

After a dinner of chicken and spicy rice back on the paddlewheeler, we started out again behind the tractor, this time on a fishing expedition. It was dark and raining hard by the time we reached the edge of the "lake."

Just when we were ready to shove off with our guides, the tropical skies burst into torrents of water. Within seconds it became impossible to see six inches. In the confusion Ethel, Mrs. Cushing and a few of the reporters were helped from their still-moored canoes by one of the priests. Only by putting our hands on one another's waists were we able to negotiate the 100 yards through the jungle to the nearest light—a native hut.

The local guides also turned back, but Kennedy could not be persuaded to quit. While Tom Johnston bailed furiously amidships, Goodwin took the forward seat and Kennedy pulled away—without a light and without a guide in the middle of the jungle. The rain was streaming down too heavily for Kennedy to see either of his two companions; occasionally he would yell to Goodwin to paddle on the other side.

Forty-five minutes later, without having seen another boat or a landmark, the trio returned, triumphantly bearing four fish that had somehow been pulled into their canoe. The native guides solemnly said that they had never expected to see Kennedy or his companions again.

It was well after midnight when we got back, still shivering, to the paddlewheeler, and Kennedy and his companions spent the next two hours drinking black coffee and warm bourbon, and talking about their experience.

The next day Kennedy snapped up a chance to visit the primitive heartland of the Amazon jungle. A reporter in the party had written a story about the Wycliffe Bible Translators, a group of Protestant missionary-pilots who proselytize isolated Indian tribes. In Manaus the newsman called Paul Marsteller, one of the Wycliffe pilots, and arranged for him to take Kennedy on an overnight visit into the interior.

The day after the fishing expedition, Marsteller, a 33-year-old Ohioan, taxied his bright yellow 1939 Norseman floatplane alongside the paddlewheeler, which was still moored off Manacapuru. After taking one look at the vintage single-engined Norseman bobbing in the placid water, Kennedy said, "I must be crazy to get on this thing." Then he kissed Ethel good-bye and climbed aboard, along with Goodwin and two reporters.

Marsteller's Norseman headed at 140 mph over the dense jungle until late afternoon, when he brought it down on a bend in the Nhamunda River near the thatched-roofed huts of a Hixkaryana Indian village 200 miles from Manacapuru. The pilot realized at once that the river was too low to permit him to get off again with his passengers aboard. The only way out—assuming Marsteller had enough taxiing room to get up carrying just his own weight—was to borrow a dugout canoe from the natives and to go downriver through 12 sets of rapids to a point where the Nhamunda was deep enough to get us all off again.

Hopping off the plane's inshore pontoon, Kennedy sprinted up the river bank through wild

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Gesturing expansively, Senator Kennedy addresses a crowd at a rural labor cooperative. Everywhere he went, Kennedy told how U.S. policy supports reform in Latin America.

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cotton bushes and banana trees. Soon the party was surrounded by a tight circle of naked, laughing children. The senator greeted the Wycliffe missionaries, Desmond and Grace Derbyshire, an English couple in their mid-40's. They, in turn, introduced him to Kayweie, the 24-year-old tribal chief, who was impressively attired in a loincloth, several beaded armbands and a large necklace. "What is your impression of the United States?" Kennedy asked Kayweie.

"I guess," the chief replied, scratching the tufts of wild cotton protruding from his hair, "that it's bigger than this place."

Kennedy toured the village huts, chucking the children under the chin, and went for a swim while Grace Derbyshire prepared dinner. Kennedy was eager to know about life among the Hixkaryana tribe. Over dinner, he pursued the questioning in much the same softly urgent tone that he had used with the presidents of four South American nations. "Do they steal each other's wives?" he asked. There was no formality about marriage, the missionary explained.

To remain on schedule (Kennedy was due to confer with Venezuelan President Raul Leoni in the late afternoon), the party arose at 3:30 A.M. With the help of four village guides, they were to make their way downriver in an 18-foot dugout canoe equipped with an outboard motor—15 miles below the village was a place where the water was deep enough for the plane to take off.

The canoe's motor failed at the start, and the trip downriver took eight hours. Whenever the canoe foundered in the rapids, Kennedy would be the first to jump overboard and push the boat forward. He was having a ball. Splashing along in the river, he mimicked a well-known television commentator in declaring: "It was impossible to pinpoint the exact time and place when he decided to run for President. But the idea seemed to take hold as he was swimming in the Amazonian river of Nhamunda, keeping a sharp eye peeled for man-eating piranhas."

Then, as an afterthought, he added: "Piranhas have never been known to bite a U.S. senator."

Further downriver, Kennedy put his paddle aside for a moment and confided that he would someday like to cross the North Atlantic in a 25-foot sailboat—alone.

"You mean like that editor in Cleveland?" one of his companions asked.

"That's it," Kennedy replied.

"That would take six weeks," the companion observed. "You are a United States senator. You could never get away with it."

"I guess you're right," Kennedy said wistfully.

Ethel and the rest of the party, joined by two television crews fresh from Rio, were already at the airport in Manaus when Kennedy pulled up, still dressed in the soggy tennis shoes, khakis and polo shirt he had worn on the Nhamunda. The Electra took off for Caracas at once.

Fifteen minutes out of Manaus the governor on the Electra's left inboard engine failed, and the propeller suddenly spun out of control. The pilot feathered the engine and turned back. Ethel, who dreads flying, clutched at her rosary beads.

When the plane had landed safely, it became clear that the President of Venezuela would just have to wait: The plane could not be repaired, and another one would have to be dispatched from distant São Paulo.

Kennedy's new friendship with the American priests assigned to Manaus rescued the evening. They maintained a secluded retreat outside the river port—just the place for a party. Ethel efficiently stripped the Electra's pantry of its ample liquor and wine stock, the priests bought the food, and the party was a great success.

At six the next morning the newly arrived Electra took off for Caracas. As we cruised along at 29,000 feet, the pilot said over the intercom: "Senator and Mrs. Kennedy, it has been a great pleasure to have you aboard. We are now crossing the Brazilian-Venezuelan border, and it is time to say good-bye."

Kennedy looked up from his magazine. "What's he going to do," he asked, "get off here?"

The end, while not so precipitous, was nonetheless drawing near. That same day Kennedy was back jabbing away with his forefinger at the immense crowds, encouraging the wretched slum dwellers from the dented roof of an embassy car: "I want you all to know how nice it is for me and my wife to be in Caracas." (*Applause.*) "We in the United States have a great admiration and a great affection for the people of Venezuela." (*Applause.*)

"I want to say to my young friends—Venezuela will continue to make progress if you're ready to stay in school. And you'll be spanked by your mothers if you don't." (*Laughter.*)

There was one final argument with Communist students, this time on network television. By now, Kennedy's debating style had become smooth and polished:

"I don't accept your description of the 'facts.' Why isn't the President of the United States a Rockefeller if big business really runs our country? What you're saying is simply ridiculous.

"Now follow up," Kennedy urged the surprised student. "Come back at me."

Once more there was danger in the air: The Communists had threatened to kidnap Ethel. They allegedly had elaborate plans to machine-gun Kennedy while he rode along the main boulevard. The CIA, it was rumored, had foiled the plot. The site of a labor rally that Kennedy was to address was changed three times in one day to throw the Communists off. Still, someone managed to set off a stink bomb in the hall when he arrived and to escape in the confusion.

Then, all at once, it was over—the crowds, the slums, the students and the danger. We were in a commercial jetliner, peering down 35,000 feet through the clouds at the city of Santo Domingo.

At Washington's National Airport, the mud of the Caracas slums still clung to Kennedy's shoes. He was greeted by a huge WELCOME HOME SENATOR sign that was unfurled by a dozen loyal members of his staff.

Eight of the nine Kennedy children climbed up the ramp of the plane to greet their parents in a torrent of hugs and kisses. Only the baby, 10-month-old Matthew Taylor Kennedy, was left at home in McLean.

The Washington press corps was also there. "People are not going to accept much longer the kind of lives they're leading . . ." Kennedy told them. "I found affection and admiration and a great wish to understand and a good deal of misunderstanding. Does that make sense?"

Christopher George Kennedy, aged two and a half, pulled at the sleeve of his father's pinstripe suit. "Can we go home now, Daddy?" he asked.

"Yes, Chris darling," his father said. "Yes, my love, yes." □

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